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The Reaction of the Roman Catholic Church to the Renaissance and its Influence on the Lutheran Reformation

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THE REACTION
OF
THE ROMAN CHURCH TO THE RENAISSANCE
AND
ITS INFLUENCE ON THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

DEDICATION
TO
THE LOVING MEMORY OF HIS WIFE
NEXT TO THE
THESES
SUBMITTED FOR THE
DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF DIVINITY
BY

JOHN B. NIEMAN

April 30, 1943
Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri.

*Agnes
Thayer
R. H. C. ...*

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DEDICATION

TO

the loving memory of him, to whom,
next to the Lord and the Luth-
eran Church, I owe the blessings
and advantages of my training
for the Lutheran Ministry:

my Father

JOHN B. NIEMAN

1876

1942

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P R E F A C E

For a proper understanding of the developments which took place in the two periods of history into which the subject matter of this paper falls, the Renaissance and the Reformation, which have their roots much farther back than the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, one must go back to the Middle Ages and even earlier to acquaint himself with the events which submerged the study of the classics and freedom of thought and expression, through the period in which the Church completely dominated society. Thus the individual will learn why there should ever have arisen the need for the Renaissance, and later still, the Reformation. But such is not the purpose of this paper.

It has seemed advisable, nay, necessary, however, to devote at least a small portion of this study to the Renaissance itself: to define the term, trace the beginnings of this movement, and follow the early scholars and their patrons as they pursued and fostered such studies. Without such a discussion it would be well-nigh impossible in any way properly to follow and evaluate the attitude and the reaction of the Roman Church to the Renaissance.

After this introductory discussion the purpose will be to show the influence of the Renaissance on the Roman Church and the reaction of the Church to this movement, especially the feelings of the Papacy, which was in those

days the Church.

This will be followed by a discussion of the Renaissance in Germany, for the reaction of the Roman Church and the development of the New Learning are inseparably united, considering both the leaders and the nature of their work.

Finally, this study brings us to the influence of the Renaissance, and with it the influence of the reaction of the Roman Church to the Renaissance, upon Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformation.

The writer at this point would like to acknowledge with gratitude the valuable assistance given by Prof. Theo. Hoyer in the preparation of this thesis, the helpful advice offered by Prof. R. Caemerer, and the typing of the manuscript by his sister.

CHAPTER ONE

(Introductory)

The Renaissance in General

What was the Renaissance? Many and varied have been the answers to this question. Almost every writer on the subject has a different view. Each man after a more or less thorough study of the field, formulates his own definition. It might be well, therefore, for us to consider some of the definitions given by the various authors.

"The term Renaissance," writes Lucas, "signifies the cultural achievements of European society between 1300 and 1600 which mark the passage from the Middle Ages to the modern world. These include such high accomplishments as art, music, literature, and science, but also far-reaching changes in the economic basis of life, the structure of society, and the organization of states."¹⁾

Lindsay says, "The movement called the Renaissance in its widest extent may be described as the transition from the medieval to the modern world. All our present conceptions of life and thought find their roots within this period."²⁾ He then proceeds to trace the developments during these centuries by enumerating the various fields in which the Renaissance played an important part: science, geography, commerce, government, literature, art.³⁾

Of a somewhat different nature is Symonds' view:

"It is the emancipation of reason in a race of men, intollerant of control, ready to criticize canons of

- 1) Lucas, The Renaissance and the Reformation, P. 3.
- 2) Lindsay, A History of the Reformation, Vol. I, P. 42.
- 3) cfr., Lindsay, op. cit., Pp. 42-44.

conduct, enthusiastic of antique liberty, freshly awakened to the sense of beauty, and anxious above all things to secure for themselves free scope in spheres outside the region of authority. Men so vigorous and independent felt the joy of exploration. There was no problem they feared to face, no formula they were not eager to recast, according to their own conception."4)

The word Renaissance has also varied in meaning from time to time. This Lucas points out when he says,

At the close of the fifteenth century and the opening of the sixteenth century it meant the revival of Latin and Greek letters. The Italians called this movement the Rinascimento, or rebirth of classical languages and literature. The word also connoted dissatisfaction with the culture of the Middle Ages, and even an active hostility to it. It was believed that Greek and Roman life was the source of all true culture. Humanists thought that the Middle Ages were an empty void, a dreary waste which could profitably be ignored."5)

Hence, though writers of different times may differ with regard to their interpretation of the term Renaissance, all are agreed that it was a period of change, of going back to the old, of rebuilding civilization upon the old and almost forgotten foundations of antiquity.

Such is the widest definition of the word. "But," in the words of Lindsay, "the Renaissance has generally a more limited meaning, and one defined by the most potent of the new forces which worked for the general intellectual regeneration. It means the revival of learning and of art consequent on the discovery and study of the literary and artistic masterpieces of antiquity. It is perhaps in this more limited sense that the movement more directly prepared the way for the Reformation and what followed, and deserves more detailed examination. It was the discovery of a lost means of culture and the consequent awakening and diffusion of literary, artistic and critical spirit."6)

4) Symonds, Renaissance in Italy, P. 13.

5) Lucas, op. cit., P. 194.

6) Lindsay, op. cit., P. 46.

In our present discussion we are chiefly interested in the revival of learning, or the study of the classics. The reason is this. The return to the study of the form and technique of the ancient masterpieces of sculpture and art had little bearing on Luther and the Lutheran Reformation. While it is true that Martin Luther was not untouched by or hostile to the ancient and contemporary works of art, and did take issue with the iconoclasts under Muenzer and Carlstadt, restraining the wreckless hands of the mobs inflamed by their preaching, yet this has little to do with the actual Reformation. Luther was interested in music, painting, et cetera, but the movement which found in him its vital energy was primarily one of letters, not art, and architecture. Therefore in our discussion of the Renaissance, the reaction of the Roman Church thereto, and the influence of this movement on the Reformation we shall restrict ourselves to the literary activities of the Renaissance often called Humanism.

One should not get the impression that during the Middle Ages, the centuries preceding the Reformation, the study of the classics was completely forgotten and that the writings of the ancient scholars were packed away in damp, dark, unused rooms of monasteries to collect dust. This may be and undoubtedly was true in many cases but, the classical literature of the Greeks, and especially the Romans, during the Middle Ages in the West was by no means so completely unknown and unstudied as is commonly thought. Rulers like

Charlemagne, Charles the Bald, Alfred the Great, and the German Ottos fostered its study. Such scholars as Eriginia, Gerbert, Bernard Sylvester, John of Salisbury, Roger Bacon, and others were comparatively well acquainted with it.

Moorish learning from Spain and intercourse with scholars of the Byzantine Empire spread classical culture during the 12th and 13th centuries, and the Hohenstaufen rulers were it eager and liberal patrons. In the 14th century the founders of Italian national literature, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, eagerly cultivated and encouraged classical studies.⁷⁾

An added incentive to the study of the classics appeared in the form of the returning Crusaders. "Through the Crusades," writes Prof. Hoyer, "contact had been established with Arabic culture, far in advance of Europe, and with Constantinople, when the literary treasures of the ancient world were still preserved. This led to a renewed study of the old classics."⁸⁾

The Renaissance for quite natural reasons began in Italy. Italy had a past literature with which to begin. She was the first country to free herself from the conditions of Medieval life. In Italy there was a distinct feeling of nationality, a somewhat advanced civilization, a degree of wealth, and a comparative freedom from continuously changing political conditions.⁹⁾

7) cfr. Kurtz, Church History, Vol. II, P. 217.

8) Hoyer, The Story of the Church, P. 36.

9) cfr. Lindsay, op. cit., P. 47.

In his work on the Renaissance and Reformation Hulme says, "In Italy all the conditions necessary for the success of such a movement as the Renaissance were present. She possessed freedom of thought. Scholasticism had never been accepted as the sole and infallible method of thought. The Italian genius, unlike the French, did not lend itself to the study of logic for its own sake. It was concerned with the concrete realities of the world rather than with mental abstractions."¹⁰

The high point of enthusiasm for classical studies in Italy was reached in the middle and latter part of the 15th century, and many outstanding classical scholars appeared. Though the writings of these men are no longer read, the service which these early Humanists of Italy, forerunners we might call them, rendered in reviving the interest in ancient literature and philosophy was enough to give their age distinction. One important and enduring feature which these men began was the science of literary and historical criticism.¹¹)

Quite naturally as these early scholars delved into the Latin classics they became aware or were reminded of the fact that Greece, too, had a past literature upon which the Latin literature had been built. Hence these men just as avidly turned to the study of the Greek language. The difficulties which these men encountered were many. The revival of the study of Greek, which had been neglected for eight centuries or more, was due, not to an interest in the original text of the New Testament, but an eagerness to become acquainted with

- 10) Hulme, The Renaissance, The Protestant Revolution, and The Catholic Reformation in Continental Europe, P. 73.
11) cfr. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. V, P. 579.

Homer, Plato and other classic Greek authors. Even Gregory the Great had no knowledge of the language. The establishing of chairs for its study was recommended by the council of Vienne, but this recommendation came to nothing. The revival of the study of this language was followed by the discovery of Greek manuscripts, the preparation of grammars and dictionaries, and the translation of the Greek classics.¹²⁾

The revival of letters in Italy cannot be considered without at least mentioning the three most outstanding men who gave it its first great impulse, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. These men were deeply interested in the classics and were among the first to strongly urge their study. Especially is this true of Petrarch (1304-74) who was one of the first to express the new spirit of Humanism, the position that the secular concerns of life were good and should not be regarded with ascetic denial.¹³⁾

How were these men, interested in the study of ancient literature, to perform this service? Where were they to find material financial support that they could devote all of their time to this self-appointed task? Lucas raises this question and gives the following answer,

Not among the nobility, for that class still lived according to traditions created in the feudal age. Preferring the chase and an elaborate code of

12) cfr., Ibid., P. 588 f.

13) cfr., Lucas, op. cit., P. 195.

chivalry, it cared little for the development of a new culture. Not among churchmen, for they were either occupied in theological studies of the old type or engrossed in practical details of monastic or episcopal administration. The lay culture of the early Renaissance made little appeal to the rank and file of the clergy. Nor could Humanists find posts at universities, for these institutions were, for the most part, governed by old conceptions which allowed little opportunity to cultivate Humanist learning. And the economic problems of life precluded the lower and middle classes of townsmen from participating in the new secular culture. The patrons of the Renaissance were, as a rule, townsmen who had grown wealthy from trade and industry. This is especially true of the aristocratic popolo grasso of Florence, among whom were the Strozzi and the Medici. They had the leisure necessary to cultivate new ideas, and devoted their energy and wealth to this end. Renaissance culture, therefore, was not only secular but also aristocratic. Possessing the greater share of the world's capital, this class inevitably appropriated social and political power. By becoming sponsors of the art, letters, and learning of the quattrocento (15th century), its members played a chief part in the formation of the new lay civilization."¹⁴⁾

The first center in which the new culture, therefore, flourished was at Florence. There it took earliest root and brought forth its finest products. Learning also, found a home at Florence. The taking of Constantinople by the Turks drove many learned men to Italy and at Florence, especially, these scholars found a refuge, continued their studies, and began to teach Greek under the patronage of the Medici,¹⁵⁾ who were among the most distinguished patrons of the Renaissance. For over a century the members of this family were intimately

14) Lucas, op. cit., P. 236.

15) cfr. Seeböhm, The Era of the Protestant Revolution, P. 67.

associated with the new culture and it can be said that the history of this house was the history of the Renaissance.¹⁶⁾

One of the most outstanding members of this family, was Cosimo de' Medici, and he, together with Lorenzo, have made their house famous. Most of the works of art of which the former approved, the world has agreed were worthy of his support. It may very well be that he received his first instruction in Greek from Chrysoloras and other outstanding scholars and achieved a considerable proficiency in the use of both Latin and Greek. He was throughout his life associated with Humanists and did much to encourage them. The House of Medici also did much to make the new learning available to their fellow-townsmen who had difficulty in studying Latin.¹⁷⁾ This family is really outstanding in its patronage of the Renaissance.

This, however, was not all that was necessary. The Italian Humanists were experiencing many difficulties in their study of the Greek language, from which much of their native Latin culture had come. The greatest need which confronted these men was someone to give them a thorough instruction in the language of the Eastern empire. A solution was necessary and the event which produced it was the council of Ferrara-Florence, 1439, when Greeks and

16) cfr. Lucas, op.cit., P. 236 f.

17) cfr. Ibid., Pp.239-247- where the writer goes into great detail to bring this out.

Italians met to discuss the possibility of healing the breach between the Eastern and Western Churches. Whatever the motives for such a reunion may have been, it did introduce the Italian Humanists to men who were capable of filling their one great need. Some of these men remained in Italy, Chrysoloras had been there, and with the fall of Constantinople many more came. ¹⁸⁾

Chrysoloras, already mentioned, was one of the most outstanding men in the beginning of the Renaissance. Of him it is said, "The appearance of Manuel Chrysoloras (1350?-1415) was an event of the greatest importance for the revival of learning. This Byzantine Greek boasted a long line of ancestors extending back to the time when Constantine settled on the Bosphorus. Chrysoloras was sent by the emperor of Constantinople to secure from the Latin west help against the Turks. He arrived in Venice in 1393 and at once found favor among the Humanists. Three years later Polla Strozzi and Niccolo Niccoli, prominent Florentines who were deeply interested in the classics, authorized Salutati to invite Chrysoloras to come to Florence as teacher of the Greek classics, and for four years the youth and mature men of Florence enjoyed his tuition. To them Chrysoloras was a sort of apostle of that distant and glorious world which through the Middle Ages had shown with romantic splendor. His knowledge was superior to that of every Humanist in the West. He fixed his auditors with zeal to make themselves masters of the new learning." ¹⁹⁾

Other such early scholars were Plethon and his pupil Bessarion, who also came from the East. Bessarion was a staunch follower of Plato, and later joined the Roman

18) cfr. Kurtz, op.cit., P. 216.

19) Lucas, op. cit., Pp. 211-212.

Church. In 1439 Pope Eugenius IV made him a cardinal, thus enabling him to exert a wide influence both within and without the church.

Through these men together with the introduction of the art of printing into Italy the ancient treasures of literature were made available to most scholars. These the Humanists of the succeeding decades employed to the best advantage. Thus the Renaissance which had its beginning in Italy rested upon the work of the pioneer Italians who fostered such study and especially upon the Greek scholars who came there to teach the classics. In the words of Kurtz, " Italy was the cradle of the Renaissance, the Greeks who settled there, its fathers."²⁰⁾

20) Kurtz, op. cit., Pl 218.

CHAPTER TWO

The Reaction of the Roman Church

In order to learn how the Church regarded the Renaissance when it began, one must consider the make-up of Medieval society. How did the people live, what was their attitude towards new things, what was their view of life? And, on the other hand, what was the outlook of the Humanists, what was their attitude? What, if anything, did the rise of the towns and the development of the universities contribute? The views of these two groups were quite opposed to each other. The Middle Ages were very ascetic, life was orientated chiefly toward the eternal. For generations the nobles had shared this view; and even practical townspeople accepted it without disagreement. But this other-worldly attitude changed rapidly during the fourteenth century. Business, the use of coined money, and the busy life of the towns created a more secular conception. Hence at the close of the Middle Ages there were two hostile points of view, the ascetic, other wordly attitude, and the attitude of the Humanists, which emphasized man's life in this world.¹⁾

With two such hostile and opposing views, both within the church, a clash was inevitable. The Renaissance was bound to produce a crisis in religion. Of this Lucas, says,

"The church had been the spiritual guardian of the of the people for more than thirty generations. It

1) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 193.

had disciplined them by means of excommunication, interdict, and its penitential system. Its other-worldliness had taught them to minimize the things of this life. But the intense asceticism inculcated by the saints and monks could not be maintained forever in the towns of Italy. The growth of temporal activities during the last centuries of the Middle Ages, due to the development of trade and industry, produced conceptions more definitely worldly. Secularization of life in all its activities became the keynote of the age, and the cult of classical letters initiated by Petrarch emphasized this transition."²⁾

At first, then, there was out and out opposition in the church to the new Learning. The church vigorously opposed the Revival of letters and did its best to maintain its absolute control over the thoughts and actions of the people. It strove to maintain its dominant, rather, its autocratic position in those days, a position which it had achieved and held during the course of several centuries. D'Aubigne writes, "There existed at that time open war between these disciples of letters and the scholastic divines. The latter beheld with alarm the great movements going on in the field of intelligence and took up the notion that immobility and ignorance would be the best safe guards of the church. It was to save Rome that divines opposed the revival of letters, but by so doing they in reality contributed to her ruin, and Rome herself unconsciously cooperated in it."³⁾

Thus the church in head and members opposed quite vigorously the study of the classics. This seems to have been the policy of the papacy for many centuries. It is not, therefore, quite so strange, then, that when scholars began to search out and bury themselves in the reading and

2) Ibid., P. 266.

3) D'Aubigne, History of the Great Reformation, P. 93.

translation of old manuscripts and the preparation of grammars and lexicons for those who were not so proficient in the use of the Greek that they incurred the wrath of the Church.

Schaff briefly pictures for us this hatred and opposition of the church through the centuries up until the time of the Renaissance. "The ban, which has been placed by the church upon the study of the classic authors of antiquity and ancient instruction, palsied polite research and reading for a thousand years. Even before Jerome, whose mind had been disciplined in the study of the classics, at last pronounced them unfit for the eye of the Christian, Tertullian's attitude was not favorable--Cassian followed Jerome; and Alcuin, the chief scholar of the 9th century turned away from Virgil as a collection of lying fables. At the close of the 10th century, a Pope reprimanded Arnulf of Orleans by reminding him that Peter was unacquainted with Plato, Virgil and Terence, and that God had been pleased to choose as his agents, not philosophers, and rhetoricians, but rustic and unlettered men. In deference to such authorities the dutiful church-men turned from the closed pages of the Old Romans and Greeks. Only did a selected author like Terence have here and there in a convent a clandestine though eager reader. In the 12th century it seemed that a new era in literature was impending, as if the old learning was about to flourish again. The works of Aristotle became more fully known through the translations of the Arabs. Schools were started in which classical authors were read. Abaelard turned to Virgil as a prophet. The Roman law was discovered and explained at Bologna and other seats of learning. ... But the head of Western Christendom discerned in this movement a grave menace to theology and religion, and was quick to blight the new shoot with his curse, and in its early statutes, forced by the Pope, the University of Paris excluded the literature of Rome from its curriculum."⁴⁾

4) Schaff, op. cit., Pp 562, 563.

This attitude, however, could not be maintained forever. The Church, although it claimed absolute authority, could not completely dominate the inquiring minds of men. People were seeking something which they could not find in the sophistries of the scholastics nor in the self-denial and questionable piety of the monks. Hence the Renaissance had to break forth, and did break forth in Italy as has already been noted. With the renewed study of the Greek and Latin classics these writings became the teachers of the people. The Church could no longer ignore or ban this new learning. Neither was she at first ready to take it over completely. Therefore she merely tolerated it.

Now that the Humanists were tolerated by the Church they could proceed without fear. They could openly study the revived classical writings of the ancients. Many church-men joined them in this. At first these men remained in harmony with the teachings of the Church. There was nothing opposed to Christianity or the medieval church in the early stages of this intellectual revival, and very little of the new paganism which it afterwards developed. Many of the instincts of this Medieval piety remained, only the objects were changed.⁵⁾

Thus the early stage of the Renaissance, in which those interested in the Revival of letters were forbidden this

5) cfr. Lindsay, op. cit., P. 48.

pleasure, had passed, and shortly thereafter followed the discontinuation of the study of the classics merely for their own sakes. The foundation had been laid; the age of scholarship succeeded; and Italian students began to interpret the ancient classical authors with a mysticism all their own. They sought a means of reconciling Christianity with ancient pagan philosophy,^{2nd} discovered it in Platonism. Platonic academies were founded, and Cardinal Bessarion, Marsiglio Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola became the Christian Platonists of Italy. Of course, in their enthusiasm, they went too far. They took over the whole intellectual life of a pagan age, and adopted its ethical as well as its intellectual perceptions, its basis of sensuous pleasures, and its joy in sensuous living. Still their main purpose was to show that Hellenism as well as Judaism was a pathway to Christianity, and that the sibyl like David was a witness for Christ.⁶⁾

During this time there arose also such men as Lorenzo Valla the founder of historical criticism. In 1440 he published a "booklet" on the "Donation of Constantine" in which he proved that this document, on which the temporal power of the papacy rested, was a forgery. He also made comparisons between the Greek

6) cfr. Ibid.

Text and the Vulgate and seriously questioned the traditional origin of the Apostles' Creed. This is only one example of which there were many. Thus the Renaissance began to undermine the Roman Church.⁷⁾

Again the Revival of letters had produced a crisis in religion and the church. Rome had been in no position to cope with the Humanistic developments due to the "Babylonian Captivity" and the Papal Schism. While the schism was in the process of being healed these problems had arisen. The Church was finally reunited under Martin V and he with Eugenius IV his successor was occupied with the question of reform and reestablishing the Papacy in Italy. Hence neither of these two Popes was much interested in classical studies. Yet some scholars did find service in the Curia.⁸⁾

With the accession of Nicholas V, the successor of Eugenius IV, Humanism came into its own within the Roman Church.⁹⁾ Nicholas saw that humanism would be less disastrous to the Vatican as an uncongenial inmate than as an irrepressible critic.¹⁰⁾ He was the first Bishop of Rome who fostered the Renaissance, and he himself may be taken as representing the sincerity, the simplicity, and the lofty intellectual and artistic aims of its earliest period. Born of an obscure family belonging to Sazan¹¹⁾, a small town near Spezia,

7) cfr. Qualben, A History of the Christian Church, P.198f.

8) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 268.

9) cfr., on this section dealing with the Popes of the Renaissance, Pastor, The History of the Popes, Volumes III-VIII.

10) The Cambridge Modern History, Vol. V. P. 5468.

11) Beard, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, P.14
has the name Sarzana, as does also Lucas, op.cit. P.270

and cast on his own resources while yet a boy, he had risen by his talents and his character to the highest position in the Church. He had been private tutor, secretary, librarian, and through all a genuine lover of books. These were the only personal luxury he indulged in, and perhaps no one in his day knew more about them. He was the advisor of Lorenzo de' Medici when he founded his great library in San Maeco. He himself began the Vatican Library. He had agents who hunted through the monasteries of Europe, and he collected the literary relics that had escaped detection in the sack of Constantinople. Before his death his library in the Vatican contained more than 5000 Mss. He gathered around him a group of illustrious scholars among whom were Laurentius Valla and Poggio Braccilalini, Cardinal Bessarion and George of Trebizond. He directed and inspired their work. Valla's critical attacks on the Donation of Constantine, and on the tradition that the twelve had dictated the Apostles' Creed, did not change his opinion of the scholar. The important Greek authors were translated into Latin by his orders. Europe saw theology, learning, and art giving each other mutual support under the leadership of the head of the Church.¹²⁾

As has been mentioned, Nicholas V was a zealous collector of books and manuscripts. Thus he became the

12) cfr. Lindsay, op. cit., P. 48 f.

real founder of the Vatican Library. Schaff describes Nicholas' eagerness for gathering these writings of the ancients and the founding of the Library in the following:

"Nicholas caught the spirit of the Renaissance in Florence, where he served as private tutor. For twenty years he acted as the secretary of Cardinal Neriolo Abergati, and travelled in France, England, Burgundy, Germany and Northern Italy. On these occasions he collected rare books, among which were Lactantius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Irenaeus, 12 Epistles of Ignatius, and one Epistle of Polycarp. Many manuscripts he copied with his own hand, and he helped to arrange the books Cosmio collected. His pontificate was a golden era for architects and authors. With the enormous sums which the year of Jubilee, 1450, brought to Rome, he was able to carry out his double passion for architecture and literature. In the bank of Medici alone, 100,000 florins were deposited to the account of the papacy. Nicholas gave worthy scholars employment as transcribers, translators or secretaries, but he made them work night and day. He sent agents to all parts of Italy and to other countries, even to Russia and England, in search of rare books, and had them copied on parchment and luxuriously bound and clasped with silver clasps. He thus collected the works of Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, Diodorus, Sæculus, Appian, Philo Judeans, and the Greek Fathers, Eusebius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, Cyril and Dionysius the Areopagite. He kindled a feverish enthusiasm for the translation of Greek authors and was determined to enrich the West with versions of all the surviving monuments of Hellenic literature. Rome became a factory of translations from Greek into Latin. Nicholas paid to Valla 500 Scudi for a Latin version of Thucydides, and to Guarino 1,500 for his translation of Strabo. He presented to Nicholas Perotti for his translation of Polybius a purse of 500 new papal ducats,--a ducat being the equivalent of 12 francs,-- with the remark that the sum was not equal to the author's merits. He offered 5,000 ducats for the discovery of the Hebrew Matthew and 10,000 gold gulden for a translation of Homer, but in vain; for Marsuppini and Oratius only furnished fragments of the Iliad, and Valla's translation of the first 16 books was a paraphrase in prose. He gave Manetti, his secretary and biographer, though absent from Rome, a salary of

600 ducats. No such liberal and enlightened friend of books ever sat in the chair of St. Peter. Nicholas also found an enduring monument in the Vatican Library, which, with its later additions, is the most valuable collection in the world of rare manuscripts in Oriental, Greek, Latin, and ecclesiastical literature. Among its richest treasures is the Vatican manuscript of the Greek New Testament. There had been older pontifical libraries and collections of archives, first in the Lateran, afterwards in the Vatican palace. But Nicholas well deserves to be called the founder of the Vatican Library. He bought for it about 5000 volumes of valuable classical and biblical manuscripts, an enormous collection for those days, -- and he had besides a private library, consisting chiefly of Latin classics. No other library of that age reached 1,000 volumes."¹³⁾

Thus Nicholas made Rome once again the capital of the world also as far as learning was concerned. Nor was the Eternal City during his pontificate the degenerated place it had been or was to become under the succeeding popes. Naturally the Humanists were well satisfied during his rule and achieved great things. Many were of a noble and pious character. His death was mourned by the whole Humanist World.

Nicholas was followed upon the throne of St. Peter by Calixtus III. It is reported that the Humanist, Cardinal Bessarion was almost elevated to that office but was finally rejected because he was a Greek who wore a beard and that this Spaniard was chosen instead, "whose chief recommendation was his age of seventy-eight."¹⁴⁾ Alfonso Borgia (Calixtus III) discontinued the policy of Nicholas V with regard to the

13) Schaff, op. cit., P. 585 f.

14) cfr. The Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. VIII, The Close of the Middle Ages, Chapter xv, P. 773.

New Learning. Many of the Humanists left Rome, but the pope did give some attention to the rebuilding of Roman Churches. Outside of, perhaps, his lack of appreciation of this culture, one reason why Calixtus did not support Humanism was the Turkish war which he undertook with great zeal. He spent in this conflict the money which was left in the treasury, sold the vessels and jewels of the Church, and sold or gave away many of the manuscripts of the Vatican Library a goodly number of which were lost.¹⁵⁾ Hence Calixtus III was not especially favorable to or favored by the Humanists.

Arneas Silvius Piccolomini was next to ascend to the papal chair and took the name Pius II. He had been a disciple of the classics for many years and had held high positions in the hierarchy. Hence he was a typical Renaissance character. Because of his zeal for learning, great things were expected of him by the scholars but many were disappointed. The reason for this was that Pius II possessed the taste and good sense to value their flattery at its true worth. He was a real patron, but within limits. He gathered manuscripts, spent some money on the embellishment of St. Peter's and the Vatican and encouraged a few scholars.¹⁶⁾

Pius II seems to have been a prolific writer. Some

15) cfr. Van Dyke, The Age of the Renaissance, P. 165.

16) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 274.

of his works were good, on a high level, and among the best of his day, but others were on a very low moral plane. Schaff has this to say of him as an author,

"Nothing seems to have escaped his eye. Everything that was human had an interest for him, and his description of cities, and men as in his Frederick III and History of Bohemia, hold the reader's attention by their clever judgments and their appreciation of characteristic and entertaining details. Pius' novels and odes breathe a low moral atmosphere, and his comedy, Chrisis, in the style of Terence, deals with women of ill-repute and is equal to the most lascivious of the Humanistic productions. His orations fill three volumes, and over 500 of his letters are still extant. 17)

Pius II was a great disappointment to the Humanists but the next pope was even worse. During the rule of Paul II they had a hard time of it. He did show favor to a few scholars but distrusted most of them because of their biting sarcasm which he feared might be turned against himself. As a measure of economy he discontinued the College of Abbreviators who drew up the papal documents but this caused him some difficulty for many of these men were Humanists. When they were thus brushed aside by the pope they turned against him. Among these was Platina and Pomponio Leto of the Platonic academy at Rome. These men because of their strong anti-papal feeling were thrown into prison, but were later released and the academy was suspended. By this time it had become a center of protest against the Christian religion.

18) Schaff, op. cit., P. 585.

Stoicism was favored among its scholars and pupils. During his pontificate printing was introduced into Italy, in 1465, by 2 Germans, Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz who set up their press at Subiaco, in the Benedictine monastery of Santa Scholastica.¹⁸⁾

With the next Pope Humanism again came into its own at the papal court. Sixtus IV was a liberal patron of the Renaissance. Besides his zeal for the improvement and beautification of Rome, he was an eager supporter of the new learning. He reestablished the Roman academy and Pomponio Leto became under his rule one of the most distinguished men of Rome. Platina was commissioned by him to write a History of the Popes. He also revived the Vatican Library which Nicholas V had begun but which was dissipated by his successors. He like his predecessor zealously collected manuscripts, transferred the library to four new beautiful halls, endowed it with a permanent fund, provided for copyists, and separated the books from the archives. Thus he proved himself a loyal friend of the Humanists.¹⁹⁾

Innocent VIII who succeeded Sixtus IV was also much interested in the Renaissance, especially in architecture. He spent much money on architecture, and bestowed considerable patronage on the new learning.²⁰⁾ supporting and furthering the study of the classics.

Otherwise his importance in the History of Humanism is

18) cfr. The Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. VIII, Pp. 773, 775 and Lucas, op. cit., P. 275.

19) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 277, Also Van Dyke, op. cit., P. 202.

20) cfr. Newman, A Manual of Church History, Vol. I. P. 537.

negligable, as is also true of his successor, Alexander VI, who was a "Monster of iniquity," a Borgia who did not even hesitate at murder to achieve his ends.

After the short rule of Pius III, only 23 days, Julius II was enthroned in the papal chair. Lindsay says of him, "Perhaps Julius II conceived more definitely than even Nicholas had done that one duty of the head of the church was to assume the leadership of the intellectual and artistic movement which was making wider the thought of Europe,--only his restless energy never permitted him leisure to give effect to his conception."²¹⁾

Professor Kraus says it is literally true that under Julius II and Leo X Rome and the papacy were the home of the Renaissance both in literature and art. The popes and cardinals surrounded themselves with poets and learned men to whom they threw open their libraries and collections.²²⁾

But in grandeur and magnificence the Renaissance first reached its zenith after Leo X, Giovanni de' Medici, had been elevated to the throne of St. Peter.

"Leo X," says Lucas, "had been brought up in the lap of Renaissance luxury. He is the best example of the refined taste in art, manners and social intercourse developed among the elite of quattrocento bourgeoisie society. His kindly smile, well-modulated voice, and kingly bearing ingratiated him with all men. Humanists greeted his elevation with pleasure and were not disappointed in him as patron. Literary men flocked to Rome and found favor at the Curia."²³⁾

Leo X himself was a polished scholar of the classics,

21) Lindsay, op. cit., P. 49.

22) cfr. The Cambridge Modern History Vol. II. P. 15.

23) Lucas, op. cit., P. 303.

having been the pupil of Politian, and encouraged the study of Greek, collected manuscripts, and restored libraries and schools in Italy. He was a correspondent of Ariosto, Machiavelli, and Erasmus.²⁴⁾

Rome in general and the Curia in particular now became the center of vigorous literary life. Every type of writing was attempted, following the classical models or striking out in the vernacular. Many outstanding scholars were invited to teach at Rome, among whom were also Greeks. Leo himself was a zealous collector of books and manuscripts which were added to the papal library.²⁵⁾

The Pope also took part in the entertainment of his day. The earliest Italian comedies were presented before him, and most of the dramas of his time were honored by his attendance.²⁶⁾ Besides being the center of literature and art, artists, musicians, actors and buffoons found shelter with Leo who joined in their conversation, and laughed at their wit. He even competed with poets in making verses off-hand. Musical instruments decorated with gold and silver he procured in Germany. Almost like the orientals he allowed himself to be charmed with entertainments of all sorts.²⁷⁾

This policy was completely reversed under Adrian VI, the successor of Leo who was too busy with reform

24) cfr. Smith, Philip, The History of the Christian Church During the Middle Ages, P. 243.

25) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 303.

26) cfr. D'Aubigne, op. cit., P. 226.

27) cfr. Schaff, op. cit., Pp. 489-490

to be concerned with the new learning. The people of Rome did not understand him and the Humanists whom he disappointed turned against him. Clement III followed him. He was of the Medici family, and hence a patron of the classics. His chief hindrance was lack of money, while the sack of Rome in 1527 gave him no assistance. This event scattered the scholars and discontinued the papal patronage. With the accession of Paul III the problem of restoring the Roman Church came into the foreground. Thus with Clement III the Renaissance papacy came to an end.²⁸⁾

The papacy and the church had come a long way in three centuries. From outright opposition to the classics they had first come to tolerate their study and later still to foster and encourage such pursuits. The high officials of the church, the Curia, and the popes themselves became deeply interested in the new learning and some can be numbered among the outstanding Humanists of Italy.

But what influence, if any, did this have on the Church? How did the scholars and Humanists, who were at the same time the leaders of the church, regard religion? What was their attitude toward doctrine? As in the attitude of the Church to the Renaissance so also in the attitude of the Renaissance to the Church there was a certain development. At first this attitude was

28) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., Pp. 304. 305.

merely one of searching for historic fact, a seeking to know what the ancients believed and taught on certain things, a returning to forgotten culture, which arose among the laity of the towns, and to which the Church remained entirely oblivious. D'Aubigne sketches this when he writes, "To a credulous simplicity disposed to believe everything, had succeeded a spirit of curiosity, an intelligence impatient to discover the foundation of things."²⁹⁾

As time went on and the Renaissance could no longer be ignored, it was taken over and fostered by the Papacy to be placed under the control of the Church rather than permit it to develop a hostile attitude over against the followers of the pope, as was noted before. It was no longer an offence against ecclesiastical custom or good morals for a clergyman to occupy himself with worldly learning,³⁰⁾ and in due time Rome became the center of the new learning. With papal patronage the Humanists could and did delve deeply into the writings of the ancients and did not return without some of their pagan philosophy adhering to them.

While, relatively speaking, Nicholas V was one of the better of the Renaissance Popes (if one can speak of degrees of good among them), yet many of his Humanist secretaries were heathen. Not that they attacked the

29) D'Aubigne, op. cit., P. 65.

30) cfr. Beard, op. cit., P. 38.

truths of Christianity or refused the rites of the Church, but that the ideals of the New Testament had little influence over their thoughts, desires, or conversation, and the classic authors did have a great deal. It was a rationalistic circle much more interested in the relation of human thought and feeling to the world than in the relation of the soul to God, secretly given to free thought, and more or less openly to free living. They respected the Church as a great institution of society; and without doubt they tried to retain such a measure of regard for religion in their hearts as might be a comfort at death, without being too troublesome while they were living.³¹⁾ One who is usually classed among such men is Valla, who attacked the foundations of the papacy from the angle of historical criticism, yet found a position at the court and who is supposed to have suggested that marriage should be abolished,³²⁾ but Kurtz maintains that he retained no small reverence for Christianity.³³⁾

In the early stages of its rule over the Papacy, then, the Renaissance had its influence but it was not as open as later. With Sixtus IV, Alexander VI, and Leo X paganism had control of the head of the Church. "Sixtus IV taxed and thereby legalized houses of prostitution for the increase of the revenues of the Curia. The 6,800 public prostitutes of Rome

31) cfr. Van Dyke, op. cit., P. 154

32) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., Pp. 266. 272; perhaps also Beard, op. cit., P. 39

33) cfr. Kurtz, op. cit., P. 219.

in 1490, if we accept Infessura's figures, were an enormous number in proportion to the population. This Roman diarist says that scarcely a priest was to be found in Rome who did not keep a concubine 'for the glory of God and the Christian religion.' The revels in the Vatican under Alexander VI and the levity of the court of Leo X furnished a spectacle which the most virtuous principles could scarcely be expected to resist."³⁴⁾

Leo X has often been called a polished pagan.

Sarpis' epigram of him deserved to be quoted, "He would have been a perfect Pope if he had combined with his many fine qualities some knowledge of the affairs of religion and a greater incentive to piety, for neither of which he manifested much concern."³⁵⁾

After his election Leo is reported by the Venetian ambassador to have said, "Let us enjoy the papacy since God has given it to us," of which statement Smith says that it exactly expressed his program.³⁶⁾

Of the influence and attitude of the Humanists in religion Kurtz has this rather long but very fine statement. "Paganism penetrated even the highest ranks of the hierarchy. Leo X is credited with saying, 'How many fables of Christ have been used by us and ours through all these centuries is very well known.' It may not be literally authentic but it accurately expresses the spirit of the papal court. Leo's private secretary, Cardinal Bembo gave a mythological version of Christianity in classical Latin. Christ he styled 'Minerva sprung from the head of Jupiter,' the Holy Spirit 'the breath of the celestial zephyr,' and repentance was with him a Deos superosque manesque placare. Even during the Council of Florence Pletho had expressed the opinion that Christianity would soon

34) Schaff, op. cit., P. 613.

35) Quoted by Van Dyke, op. cit., P. 194.

36) These words are quoted by Smith, Preserved, in his The Age of the Reformation, P. 19, upon which he makes his statement.

develop into a universal religion not far removed from classical paganism; and when Pletho died, Bessarion comforted his sons by saying that the departed had ascended into the pure heavenly spheres, and had joined the Olympic Gods in mystic Bacehus dances. In the halls of the Medici there flourished a new Platonic school, which put Plato's philosophy above Christianity. Alongside of it arose a new perepatitic school whose representative, Peter Pompanazzo, who died A. D. 1526, openly declared that from the philosophical point of view the immortality of the soul is more than doubtful. ... The highly gifted Aretino, in his poetical prose writings reached the utmost pitch of obscenity. He was called the 'divine Aretino' and not only Charles V and Francis I honored him with presents and pensions, but also Leo X, Clement VII, and even Paul III showered him with esteem and favor. In their published works the Italian Humanists generally ignored, rather than contested the church and its doctrines and morality."³⁷⁾

To show how far the Roman Church had gone in its acceptance of the Renaissance philosophy of materialism it need only be mentioned that the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) considered it necessary to reaffirm the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and charged the professors at the universities to defend this teaching against the Humanists.³⁸⁾ Kraus says "It was groundless suspicion that overshot the mark when Martin Luther accused Leo of disbelief in the immortality of the soul,"³⁹⁾ but we leave it to any sane man to judge what purpose there was for such a resolution of the council if that very doctrine was not widely contested among the members of the hierarchy.

37) Kurtz, op. cit., P. 218 f.

38) cfr. Newman, op. cit., P. 540; also Schaff, op. cit., P. 610.

39) The Cambridge Modern History, Volume II, The Reformation Chapter I, F. X. Kraus, P. 19.

Thus, the return to the classics not only did not benefit the Roman church but led it farther and farther away from the truth. The worship of culture and art was substituted for the adoration of Christ. The paganism of the ancient Greeks and Romans, occasionally, but not always, done over into Christian phraseology became the religion of the hierarchy. So corrupt was of the church that Machiavelli wrote, "We Italians are/all most irreligious and corrupt; we are so because the representatives of the Church have shown the worst example."⁴⁰⁾ The achievements of the Renaissance were outstanding, but this was the last movement of importance in Europe in which Italy and the Popes took the lead. If the aesthetic and intellectual enthusiasm had joined itself to a stream of religious regeneration, Italy might have kept in advance of other nations, but she produced no religious leaders. No Reformer arose to lead her away from dead religious forms to spiritual life, from ceremonies and relics to the New Testament.⁴¹⁾ It was left to a greater man who could avoid the disadvantages and dangers of the new learning and yet devote its advantages and scholarship to the cause of Christ and for the advancement of His kingdom, to perform this most important work.

⁴⁰⁾ Schaff, op. cit., P. 608.

^{41.} cfr. Ibid. P. 564.

CHAPTER THREE

Spread of the Renaissance to Germany

What influence if any did the Renaissance and the reaction of the Roman Church to this movement have on Luther and the Lutheran Reformation? Before we can accurately gauge this it will be necessary to follow briefly the development of the Renaissance in Germany, become acquainted with some of its outstanding scholars, and learn with what type of Humanism Luther came in contact.

Humanism from Italy soon found its way into Germany shortly after the study of the classics had been revived there because of the close political connection between the two countries. Moreover, German merchants from the large cities of the southern part of their country carried on a busy trade with the cities of Northern Italy, which were at the ends of the Mediterranean trade routes and where they had their factories. As these cities became wealthy and their burghers had more leisure the refinement from the south crept in and the new learning came with it. Another link with the Renaissance in Italy was the large group of German students who traveled south to study at the Italian Universities and brought back with them this revived culture and zeal for study of the writings of the ancients.¹⁾

1) *cf.* Lucas, *op. cit.*, P. 367

It is hard to select any one person as being responsible for the spread of Humanism to the north, but if such a selection should be made, the lot would fall upon Aeneas Sylvius (later Pope Pius II), who by his residence at the court of the German emperor, Frederick III, and also at Basel, as one of the secretaries of the council, became well-known beyond the Alps long before he became Pope. However, this should not be stressed. The merchants, students, and visits and campaigns of the European rulers into Italy brought many in contact with the new learning, as did also the continual flow of pilgrims to and from the Eternal City.²⁾

Among the early German Humanists were Peter Luder and Conrad Celtes. Especially noteworthy also is Conrad Peutinger who was an eager exponent of the new learning. He had studied in Italy where he received his Doctor's degree and then returned to Germany. He was, however, a practical man, as were many of the Northern Scholars, and did not give his life over completely to the new culture, but continued to be an active man in the affairs of city and country. Around him were gathered many young Humanists, as was quite customary. One of his chief interests lay in theology, a trait which was quite common among his fellow German Humanists.³⁾

As in Italy, the center of Humanism was in the cities.

2) cfr. Schaff, op. cit., P. 619 f.

3) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 271.

Here they gathered, not in the universities but in small and intimate groups. And as in Italy where popes and cardinals patronized the scholars, so in Germany the Emperor and some of the leading princes gave their protection and support to the movement.⁴⁾

"Emperor Maximilian (1493-1519) was especially significant as a Humanist ruler. He was conscious of the greatness of the imperial dignity, a glory which extended back to the days of the Roman Caesars. He was a man of great personal charm, affable, and able to appreciate the new art and literature, and his restless activity captured the imagination of the German people. His court became a center of Humanist activity for Maximilian turned to excess as a Humanist. Poets and enthusiasts hurried to his court and received gifts from the impecunious emperor, often being crowned by him. Maximilian loved to set the vogue of literary appreciation."⁵⁾

Humanism did not find a home at the German Universities, not because there was a lack of such institutions but because during the fifteenth century all the universities were under the influence of the church and the method of study was prescribed by scholasticism. But gradually the new learning gained an entrance. Scholars of the classics were invited to lecture or live as private teachers in the university towns, and the students studied the Latin classical authors.⁶⁾ The chief university of the new learning was at Erfurt. It was regarded as the home, or special nursery of Humanism. In about 1460 the first representatives of classical culture, Luller and Publius appeared there, and from that

4) cfr. Mackinnon, The Origins of the Reformation, P. 362.

5) Lucas, op. cit., P. 369.

6) cfr. Lindsay, op. cit., Pp. 55. 63.

date the school never lacked Humanist teachers. There also a Humanist circle gradually grew up among the students.⁷⁾

In North and Northwest Germany the Humanist culture did not grow up chiefly among the wealthy burghers but rather was built up upon the schools of the Brethern of the common life. This mystical group through their fine school system had laid an adequate foundation upon which the Renaissance could build. Although they were at first devoted to medieval ideas of piety and morality, they could not forever resist the influence of the new learning. It was not long before men versed in the Humanist learning appeared among them and introduced their teachings.⁸⁾ While, as Beard points out, these Medieval Catholic mystics should not be regared as precursors of Luther,⁹⁾ yet the Reformer had a high regard for them, Hyma quotes him as saying, "Nowhere have I found so clean an explanation of original sin as in the little treatis of Gerard Groote, Blessed is the Man, where he speaks as a sensible theologian, and not as a rash philosopher."¹⁰⁾

Among the outstanding Humanists of Germany must be mentioned Willibald Pirkheimer. His father had long been an admirer of Humanist thought, and it was due to him that his son was sent to the universities of Padua and Pavia. Willibald was supposed to study Roman law, but like so many other youths of his day, preferred the classical languages and literature. His career in later life was

7) cfr. Kurtz, op. cit., P. 220

8) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 372.

9) cfr. Beard, op. cit., P. 16.

10) Huma, The Christian Renaissance, P. 309.

much like that of Pentinger. He became a councilor of the government of Nuremberg, was sent on numerous missions as ambassador, and was intimate with Emperor Maximilian. He dearly loved Germany and eagerly read its history, but never wearied of pouring over the ancient classics and he made translations of Greek authors. He wrote on politics, literature, and history. He was also an able pamphleter and is supposed to have penned a biting satire against Dr. John Eck, the opponent of Luther. His sisters also were interested in the new ideas of the day. Charitas read the Latin classics and even conversed in the polished Latin of Cicero. She became abbess of a convent in Nuremberg and was one of the first German women to show what Humanism could accomplish for womankind.¹¹⁾

Another German Humanist, if he may be considered such, was Ulrich von Hutten. Though he is chiefly remembered for his nationalistic ideas, his part in the Knights' War, and perhaps also for his interest and support of Luther after the Leipzig debate, not for his theology, but because he opposed the papacy, yet he is classed among the German Scholars by Lindsay, who writes of him, "He was a Humanist and a poet, but a man apart, marked out from among his fellows, destined to live in the memories of his nation when their names had been forgotten. They might be better scholars, able to write a finer Latinity, and pen trifles more elegantly; but he was a man with a purpose. His erratic and by no means pure life, was enobled

11) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 371.

by his sincere, if limited and unpractical patriotism. He wrought, schemed, fought, flattered, and apostrophised to create a united Germany under a reformed emperor. Whatever hindered this was attacked with what weapons of sarcasm, invective, and scorn which were at his command; and the one enemy was the Papacy of the close of the fifteenth century and all that it implied. It was the papacy that drained Germany of gold, that kept the Emperor in thralldom, that set one portion of the land against the other, that gave the separatist designs of the princes their promise of success. The Papacy was his Carthage which must be destroyed."12)

One of the outstanding German Scholars was Reuchlin, who made a scientific study of language as a preparation for literature, sacred as well as classic.

Mackinnon says, "In Johann Reuchlin German Humanism produced its first distinguished Hebraist, who fought the battle on behalf of critical scholarship against the obscurantists of the schools. Though a jurist by profession first as assessor at Stuttgart and later as one of the judges of the Suabian League, he had combined the study of Greek as well as Latin with the usual subjects of the arts course at Paris and Basle, and with Law at Orleans, to which he subsequently added that of Hebrew. He perfected his knowledge of the classics during several visits to Italy, where he made the acquaintance of Picino and Mirandola, and ere long signalled his proficiency in classical and Hebrew philology by the publication of several works which gained him an international reputation. His mastery of the Hebrew made him acquainted with the errors of the Vulgate translation of the Old Testament, which, though a layman, he did not hesitate to point out. His great merit consists in his being the pioneer of the critical study of the original language of the Old Testament, to a true knowledge of which he contributed by his method as much as by his erudition to open the way."13)

It would be beyond the purpose of this paper to go into his controversy with Pfefferkorn over the study of the language and writing of the Jews, but the results should

12) Lindsay, op. cit., P. 76.

13) Mackinnon, Origins of the Reformation, P. 364.

be noted. Reuchlin's triumph over Pfefferkorn had a momentous effect on German opinion and a strong impetus was given to the study of Hebrew and Greek, especially with regard to their influence on theology and Biblical criticism.¹⁴⁾

"The effect of this controversy," says Newman, "was to arouse the evangelical humanists of Germany to polemical zeal and to multiply the enemies of blind intollerance and bigotry. Many of the young men who were to play an important part in the Protestant Revolution, such as Vadian, Melanchthon, Capito, and OEccolampadius, championed the cause of Reuchlin and were thereby prepared for the more radical work of later years."¹⁵⁾

The greatest German Humanist, in fact, the greatest Humanist was Desiderius Erasmus. Reuchlin's fame as a critical scholar was surpassed by that of Erasmus, who applied his critical method to the New Testament writings. He was a brilliant combination of the critical scholar and the Christian moralist and Reformer.¹⁶⁾

Of the man himself, we note that all the ethical and intellectual conceptions which the age of the revolt brought forth were united in him. He was the first modern man of letters to rely almost entirely upon the printing press for the spread of his ideas, and he addressed his thoughts to all leading Europeans. Few men have exerted so powerful an influence upon their contemporaries.¹⁷⁾

- 14) cfr. The Cambridge Modern History, Volume I, The Renaissance, Chapter XVI, Richard C. Jebb. P. 573.
15) Newman op. cit., Vol. II, P. 33.
16) cfr. Mackinman, Origins of the Reformation, P. 366.
17) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 386.

Among his many contributions to the new learning there stands out above all others his critical editions of the New Testament. He was filled with an intense hatred for the monasteries and monastic system and never failed to attack them vigorously when the occasion offered itself. Especially is this evident in his work the Praise of Folly, in which he looks to Humanism as the reforming influence in the church, by which he would educate the people and thus produce in them the desire for a practical reformation.

"In this work he attacks with a boldness astounding in one who was by nature not remarkable for courage or militant conviction, the formalism, superstition and hypocrisy of the churchmen. The audacity of the attacks shows the seriousness of the abuses against which it was directed, and Erasmus must have felt fairly sure both of his case and of the sympathy and approval of powerful partisans in Church and State before running the risk of the censure of the Church."¹⁸⁾

How did the Church and its leaders regard these attacks upon themselves? These men who were eager followers and patrons of the new learning did not object to such satirizations of the vices of the church and the times. Erasmus himself always, in his serious works, was careful to have the protection of the Ecclesiastical leaders.¹⁹⁾

In all of this it becomes clear that there were certain fundamental differences between the Italian and the German Humanism, and between the attitudes of

18) Mackinnon, Origins of the Reformation P. 369.

19) cfr. Lindsay, op. cit., P. 183.

these two groups of scholars. The German scholars were not blind imitators of the Italians. They received an impetus from the men south of the Alps, but then followed their own way.²⁰⁾

In the first place the Renaissance learning north of the Alps was not merely a study of the classics for their own sakes, nor for interpreting them. The work of the German scholars was always applied to religion. If these scholars were less brilliant, they were more exact in their scholarship. Their attention was mainly centered in the Bible, and Greek and Hebrew were studied so that the Old and New Testaments might be more correctly translated and interpreted.²¹⁾

This was the point they emphasized--back to the Bible, the original source of Christianity, and to the Church Fathers for their interpretation of Scripture. To facilitate this return, study the classics. But another, perhaps less characteristic feature of German Humanism was their opposition to the moral and intellectual decay of the clergy. This was driven home by the satire of Erasmus, Hutten, and others, and was condemned by all after the case of Reuchlin and Pfefferkorn. A good summary of the contribution made by the German Humanists to the Renaissance in Germany is given by Ferguson.

20) *cfr.* Schaff, *op. cit.*, P. 618.

21) *Ibid.*, P. 619.

"The Northern Humanists made this most distinctive contribution, however, in the field hitherto monopolized by the scholastically trained clergy. The 'Christian Humanists,' as they have frequently been called, carried a fresh layman's attitude into the closed and rather stuffy atmosphere of theological study and religious thought.

"Reaction against the decadent scholasticism, which to them represented medieval theology, the Humanists looked back across the Middle Ages to Christian antiquity, and sought in the Bible and the works of the early Fathers the pure sources of Christian doctrine. These they studied as they had been trained to study classical texts, in their original tongue and from the most authentic manuscripts using all the equipment of philological and historical criticism that generations of classical scholarship had placed at their disposal. Their insistence that Greek and Hebrew were indispensable for the study of theology offended the theologians who lacked the knowledge of either, while their discovery of numerous errors in the accepted Latin text of the Vulgate aroused the conservatives to inarticulate fury. Moreover, the Humanists ignored the allegorical interpretations on which so much of scholastic dogma was founded, they strove merely to understand the literal meaning of the sacred texts and thereby to arrive at the intention of the apostolic writers. The positive result of this revolutionary method was simple evangelical piety which laid greater stress on the moral and ethical spirit of primitive Christianity than on dogma or ceremonial practices. Without wishing to break with the universal Church, the Christian Humanists evolved a program for reforming it through enlightened education, using their concept of the 'philosophy of Christ' as a touchstone to distinguish between what was fundamental to Christian teaching and the irrelevant accretions that had grown up about the medieval Church."²²⁾

This was the distinctive difference between Italian and German Humanism. The German scholars were deeply interested in and concerned themselves with theology and its original sources.

22) Ferguson, The Renaissance, Pp. 120. 121.

How did the Roman Church regard the German Humanism? Did Rome proceed to make its place with the Northern Renaissance as it had done with the Italian Humanism? There is hardly anything available that one can bring to bear on this point. This much is certain, however, that the lower clergy resented the writings of the Humanists against them, while the higher clergy, among whom were the liberal patrons of the New Learning did not object to these satires on the church and the church-life of the day, especially when done by Erasmus.²³⁾ Hence, from the study made, it cannot be shown that the Church was hostile to the Northern Humanism, even if it did not too much appreciate the return of these Scholars to Christian antiquity and Biblical studies. So far no case has been cited where the Curia rebuked or took any action against any of the German Scholars especially not against Erasmus despite his caustic attacks on the Churchmen.

23) cfr., Lindsay, op. cit., p. 183.

CHAPTER FOUR

Influence on the Lutheran Reformation

What influence, if any, did Humanism have on the Lutheran Reformation? How did the Renaissance affect Luther? What was the regard of the Humanists for Luther, and what was Luther's opinion of the scholars and the new learning? What bearing did the reaction of the Roman Church to the Renaissance have on Luther and the movement to which he gave his name? To answer these questions it will be necessary to develop Luther's contacts with Humanism and its representatives, and then to determine if possible how he was influenced by this movement in general.

Probably the first contact Luther had with the interest in the classics was while he studied at the University of Erfurt, where Humanism had become established about 1480 and where ever since it had made its home. While at Erfurt he did not attend any of the Humanist lectures. He did find time, however, to read a good many Latin authors privately, and also to learn some Greek. Virgil and Plautus were among his favorite authors as was also Cicero; and he read Livy, Terence, and Horace. He seems also to have read some selections from Propertius, Persius, Lucretius, Tibullus, Silviu*s* Italicus, Statius, and Claudian, but he was never a member of the Humanist circle for he was too much in earnest about religious questions.¹⁾

1) cfr. Lindsay, op. cit., P. 297.

Lucas points out that Luther did hear Emser of Ulm, a Humanist lecture at Erfurt in 1504, and that at the time Luther was at Erfurt no Humanist group existed at that city in Luther's day. He continues, "The circle of poets at nearby Gotha, composed of Crotus Rubeanus, Eobanus Hessus, Mutianus, and others appeared only after Luther entered the monastery. Yet he acquired an abiding appreciation for classical writers and years after persisted in quoting passages from them. He did not become a Humanist. His Latinity, never chastened by a careful study of classical models, always remained brusque. Nor did he ever reach the point where he could fully appreciate the Humanists' zeal for what in that day was called poetry. Nevertheless the scholarly equipment of Humanism which he began to acquire at this time was to be of profound significance later when he began his Biblical studies."²)

While we may doubt some of Lucas' statements with regard to Luther's ability in Latin, this much is certain that Luther was not much interested in the new learning at that time nor was he an ardent follower or admirer of the Humanists.

It is not necessary for us here to go into Luther's life in the monastery, nor his early struggles with his conscience. But we are interested in his instruction given at Wittenberg as to whether he later developed a more Humanistic spirit. Nothing can be shown from Luther's lectures that he had by that time become a follower of the new learning. Undoubtedly he did make use of the tools which the Humanists had prepared. Humanist influence with which Luther had come in contact ever since he was a student at Erfurt now bore fruit.

2) Lucas, op. cit., P. 426.

He took a very simple view of the Bible. Only the literal meaning in its historical setting interested him, he cared nothing for allegories, far-fetched moral interpretations, and worthless seeking for impossible anagogical meanings. Grammatical studies now became especially important. His lectures greatly impressed his hearers, the students being especially fond of their professor's original way in treating Biblical texts, but none perhaps yet realized the revolutionary tendencies that were hidden in them.³⁾ Luther as professor was not a Humanist, now did he ever become one. He made good use of the methods of scholarship, the grammars, Erasmus' New Testament, and other works but he never became a lover of the classics for their own sake; he never followed the scholars in their attempts to write in the style of the classical authors.

How did the Humanists regard Luther? At first they were indifferent, since he was practically unknown, but after they saw that at the Leipzig Debate he was opposing some of the things to which they were opposed, they welcomed him as one of them. Besides his adherents at the University, Luther also found eager allies among the literary class.⁴⁾ The Humanists for many years had made fun of many church officials because of their poor

3) cfr. Ibid. P. 431.

4) Fisher, The Reformation, P. 102.

Latin, their lack of appreciation for the classics, and their preference for the philosophy and sophistry of the scholastics over the study of Greek. They saw in Luther one who was making common cause with them and hailed him as another Erasmus. Many were much pleased with him, such as Crotus, Rubeanus, Link, Scheurl, Pirkheimer, and a book appeared Eccius Dedolatus, Eck Planed Off, of a satirical nature, whose authorship is contested.⁵⁾

Of Luther's early relations with the Humanists

Mackinnon writes, "A common band between him and the Humanists was the polemic against the Scholastic theologians. In this respect Luther and the Humanists were firm allies. The motive of this polemic was, in his case, religious and theological rather than intellectual or rational, and Erasmus and his followers might not be prepared to accept his characteristic doctrine of justification, based as it was on the denial of the natural powers of the will and of reason in the sphere of religion. Even so, in drawing his theology from the early sources of Christianity, he might well appear to the Humanists as a true Erasmian. They saw in him, in fact, a brilliant protagonist of the enlightened Christianity for which Erasmus, by his critical labors was preparing the way. For this reason alone he was already exciting a growing interest in humanist circles. His reputation was no longer confined to those who, like Lang and Spalatin had been closely associated with him as student and monk."⁶⁾

At first, then, Luther was accepted by the Humanists as one of them because he was with them in their opposition to Scholasticism.

However, this attitude of the Humanists did not last long. They soon changed their position to indifference

5) cfr. Lucas. op. cit., P.441.

6) Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P.255.

and then opposition when they learned the true character of Luther's work. Beard gives the following reason for this, "For some students of classical antiquity, the purely religious interests which prevailed at Wittenberg had little attraction: other and graver scholars not only had no sympathy with Luther's characteristic doctrine, but thought the atmosphere of the elder church more favorable to the intellectual freedom which was the breath of their life."⁷⁾

Those men who had welcomed the Reformation cast in their lot with Rome because, while it contained many abuses and superstitions which the Humanists hated, yet at this time it was still fairly tolerant of the scholars.⁸⁾ And according to Pollard the strict doctrines of the Reformers did not at all appeal to the Humanists. Not that they were blind partisans of the Papacy, for they had for a long time desired a Reformation, but they did not appreciate Luther's methods, and looked to a council for reform. They did not want revolution so they decided in favor of the old Church.⁹⁾

It may not be out of place to consider a few of the personal reactions of the great Humanist leaders in this connection. Reuchlin the great Hebrew scholar, never seems to have been one of Luther's admirers. While he did prevent Eck from burning Luther's books at Ingolstadt,¹⁰⁾ he left unanswered a letter from Luther in 1518.¹¹⁾ He turned away from Melancthon

7) Beard, op. cit., P. 337.

8) cfr. Smith, Preserved, The Age of the Reformation, P. 434.

9) cfr. The Cambridge Modern History, Vol. II. Pp. 167, 168.

10) cfr. Schaff, op. cit., P. 630.

11) cfr. Kurtz, op. cit., P. 222.

because of his adherence to Luther,¹²⁾ and published a vindication of himself against charges of sympathy with Luther.¹³⁾

Rubeanus wrote in 1531, "I admit that for some years I was very favorable inclined to Luther's enterprise, but when I saw that nothing was left untorn or undefiled. ... I thought that the devil might bring in greater evil in the guise of something good, using Scripture as his shield. So I decided to remain in the church in which I was baptized, reared and taught. Even if some fault might be found in it, yet in time it might have been improved, sooner, at any rate, than in the new church which in a few years has been torn by so many sects."

And Pirkheimer said, "I do not deny that at the beginning all Luther's acts did not seem to be vain, since no good man could be pleased with all these errors and impostures that had accumulated gradually in Christianity. So, with others, I hoped that some remedy might be applied to such great evils, but I was cruelly deceived. For, before the former errors had been extirpated, far more intolerable ones crept in, compared to which the others seemed child's play."¹⁴⁾

Now we come to Erasmus. This greatest of the Humanists also broke with Luther and turned completely against him.

We have noted his ideas of reform through education.

Erasmus was weak and vacillating with regard to the Reformation of the Church.¹⁵⁾ Although he had contributed much to scholarship through his editions of the New Testament and the Church Fathers, he was much too fond of a friendly literary life, and his conceptions of the corruption of the church was much too superficial, so that he sought reformation by human culture rather than by the divine power of the Gospel.¹⁶⁾

12) cfr. Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol.III, P.225.

13) cfr. Newman, op. cit., P. 33.

14) Both of these statements are quoted by Preserved Smith in his work The Age of the Reformation, pp. 103.104

15) cfr. Peter, History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, P. 30.

16) cfr. Kurtz, op. cit., P. 224.

As to his direct conflict with Luther much has been written condemning these men, one favoring Luther, one Erasmus. One says Luther was too dogmatic and thus lost the valuable support of the Humanists for his cause,¹⁷⁾ while another accuses Erasmus of being a man of halting opinions, not willing to come out boldly and take a definite stand, always seeking a way to safeguard his life.¹⁸⁾ We are forced to take the latter view, not only because we agree with Luther in his scriptural position, but also because it seems that there was a weakness in Erasmus' character.

But, be that as it may, the chief point in their conflict was on the freedom of the will. Luther emphasized the corruption of human will and held that its effort to do good, were valueless in the sight of God. This idea that the human will was bound by sin and wiped out by total depravity was shocking to Erasmus. He felt, and so did most Humanists, that freedom was necessary for men to lead Christian lives. Therefore he wrote his De Libero Arbitrio in 1524 which Luther answered in 1525 by his De Servo Arbitrio. Thus the breach was complete.¹⁹⁾ Many, in fact, most Humanists followed their leader in breaking off with the Reformation.

What was Luther's personal attitude toward the new learning, the study of the classics? Any unbiased

17) So Smith, Preserved, op. cit., P. 107.

18) So Schaff, op. cit., Vol. VI, P. 402.

19) cfr. Lucas, op. cit., P. 502; Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. III, Pp. 224-273.

person will hardly agree with Kraus when he writes,

"Luther was not touched in the least degree by the artistic developments of his time; brought up amid the peasant life of Saxony and Thuringia he had no conception of the whole world that lay between Dante and Michelangelo, and could not see that the eminence of the Papacy consisted at that time in its leadership of Europe in the province of art. But to deny this now would be injustice to the past."²⁰⁾

Not even Erasmus brought such a charge against Luther.

Beard writes, "When Erasmus says, more than once, with quite sufficient bitterness, that 'wherever Lutheranism reigns, there good letters perish,' it is to be noticed that he excepts Luther and Melanchthon from this general censure. Luther was all his life a zealous promoter of education. ... I do not think it is possible to quote from his works or letters passages which tend to the serious disparagement of classical culture, and Melanchthon was distinctly a humanist."²¹⁾

Krauth writes, "Luther was a devoted student of the Hebrew and Greek. In 1505, after his entrance into the cloister, Luther devoted himself, with that earnestness which marked all he did, to the study of Hebrew and Greek. He had skillful teachers in both languages. As professor and preacher in Wittenberg, he continued both studies with great ardour."²²⁾

But while Luther laid great stress upon the study of the languages and devoted much time to them,²³⁾ he never was a Humanist. He was a theologian. Mackinnon

brings this out when he says of Luther, "He had no taste for the cynicism, the flippancy, the naturalism of the laxer type of Humanist, or for the speculative free thinking of Mutianus. The monk and the theologian outweighed in Luther the Humanist. In spite of the tendency to break loose from the scholastic bonds, he was too conservative in theology to appreciate independent speculation or look at religion in the broad, human sense. For him there were certain dogmatic assumptions which he regarded as fundamental."²⁴⁾

20) The Cambridge Modern History, Vol. II, The Reformation, Chapter I, Kraus, P. 8.

21) Beard, op. cit., P. 338 ff.

22) Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and its Theology, P. 90.

23) cfr. Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. III. Pp. 219 f.

24) Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, Vol. I, P. 253.

Though Luther made use of the tools which the Renaissance placed into his hands, he was not a follower of the new learning. No, Luther was not a Humanist.

What influence, then, did the Renaissance, and the Catholic reaction to the Renaissance, have on the Reformation? The Renaissance, among other things helped to educate the laity. And while the Roman Church took over the new learning and sponsored it, yet nothing was done to educate the monks and common priests. One thing only could have saved the Church; and this was to rise higher than the laity. To keep on the same level with them was not enough. But on the contrary the Church was a great deal behind the laity. It began to decline just when they began to arise. While the laity was ascending in the scale of intelligence, -- the priests and monks were absorbed in worldly pursuits and worldly interests.²⁵⁾ This of course would not have caused the Reformation, but perhaps the advance in education caused by the Renaissance turned the people from the illiterate priests to a better educated clergy.

Another contributing influence closely connected with education was the low morals of the clergy. The Roman Church had taken over the classics and espoused their paganism. Quite naturally this did not raise the moral standards of the clergy, which were low already, and the people, improving in education, became more and

25) cfr. D'Aubigne, op. cit., P. 65.

more disgusted with the church for allowing this to continue, nay, grow worse. There was widespread antagonism to the clergy, high and low, on account of their all too prevalent worldliness and immorality.²⁶⁾ While the Renaissance did not cause this degeneration in morals among the leaders of the church, it did not check this decline but assisted it. The Renaissance gave liberty to the individual and so far its work was wholesome, but it was liberty not bound by proper restraints. It ran wild in an excess of indulgence, so that Machiavelli could say, "Italy is the corruption of the world."²⁷⁾

But the chief contribution which the Renaissance made to the Reformation was its reemphasis upon scholarship. Not that study had altogether ceased before the days of the new learning but Humanism did supply the Reformation with many of the tools with which it performed what it did, and the Roman Church, by sponsoring this movement, did therefore, to its own disadvantage, assist the Reformation. Erasmus' editions of the New Testament and the Church Fathers, Reuchlin's Hebrew Grammar and lexicon, all worked together to assist the leaders of the Reformation in their work. Classical studies gave men who desired a genuine reformation of the Church a rich, linguistic,

26) cfr. Mackinnon, The Origins of the Reformation, P. 420.

27) cfr. Schaff, op. cit., P. 617.

philosophical, and scientific culture, without which, as it was applied to research in church history and the intpretation of scripture, both of which produced a restoration of doctrine, the reforms of the sixteenth century could hardly have been carried out in a complete and satisfactory manner. The most permanent advantage won by the church and theology by the revival of learning was by removing Holy Scripture from the darkness which had enshrouded it and by giving it again its proper place as the light of the Church. 28)

Mackinnon also points this out when he writes,

"Another factor opperating towards the Reformation throughout the late medieval period makes itself increasingly felt in the new culture, which by the beginning of the sixteenth centurey has become a powerful intellectual movement. It broadened the outlook on life and fostered the tendency to venture away from the old to a new order of things. Though not necessarily inimical to the papacy of the Church, it represents a reaction from the thought, the mental temparament and outlook of the Middle Ages, and its tendency is to undermine the basis on which the medieval ecclesiastical system rested. It set itself against the scholastic theology and the scholastic method in education, and substituted a culture inspired and moulded by the study of classic literature. In their reaction from the scholastic theology, Luther and his fellow-reformers were only carrying further the anti-scholastic reaction led by a Valla, a Crotus Rubeanus, an Erasmus, and a Colet. This reaction, combined with personal religious experience, inevitably led to a revaluation of Christianity, a transformation of the Church--its creeds and Ansti-tutions--based on the New Testament. It discarded a one-sided theological and monastic view of life for the larger humanist conception; the free development

28) cfr. Kurtz, op. cit., P. 228.

of the individual, the free exercise of the reason for the medieval system of authority. It evoked the critical spirit and threw the search-light of criticism on institutions, systems, doctrines. Most important of all, it gave a potent impulse to the study of the Scriptures and the early Christian writers in the original languages, the historical origins of Christianity in contrast to its later medieval developments. It applied a test of historic criticism to the papal claims and the medieval dogmatic spirit. In some of its votaries, indeed, it nurtured a license in thought and life which threatened to submerge Christianity itself as well as the Church under a wave of scepticism. In others, happily, it was combined with an earnest appreciation of the Gospel and with a striving to reform the Church and the world in accordance therewith. In not a few cases it ultimately furnished recruits for the cause of evangelical reform."²⁹⁾

Thus while it cannot be said that the Renaissance and the reaction of the Roman Church to the Renaissance produced the Reformation, it did make worthwhile contributions to the movement. The Roman Church, by sanctioning and fostering Humanism, in that way contributed to her own downfall, for the Reformation did make use of the Renaissance products in the study of languages.

29) Mackinnon, Origins of the Reformation, P. 414.

C O N C L U S I O N

We have traced the Renaissance, particularly its interest in classical studies, from its beginning through the time the Church opposed it, through the days of ecclesiastical toleration, to the time it was taken over by the Church, patronized by popes and cardinals, and its influence felt throughout the hierarchy. We have especially noted the reaction of the various popes to this movement, some opposing it, some supporting it more strongly than others, some becoming out and out Humanists, until the time when it had worn itself out and was no longer a prime concern of the Church.

Next we followed the Renaissance as it spread from Italy to Germany. We noted its early beginnings there, some of the early leaders, the outstanding Humanists, and the different characters of the German Renaissance, namely that it concerned itself with classics and originals primarily in the light of their influence on Religion. They were interested in a Biblical or Christian Humanism by which they were able to search out, investigate, and study in as much as this was possible the originals of Scripture and thus learn the teachings of God's word not as the church had interpreted them, but as they are in Scripture and as the early Church Fathers had understood them.

At that time Luther came upon the scene. Although he had not been educated as a Humanist, after one or two public appearances he was welcomed by the scholars because of his opposition to the evils of the church, one of the things which they also were condemning. When they learned Luther's true purpose, however, they left him almost as quickly as they had given him their support because they did not relish such out and out hostility with the Church, and because their purpose was not to separate from the church but to reform it from within. Many even turned against him, among them the greatest of their group, Erasmus.

Luther, himself, never was a Humanist. He did have many contacts with it, joined the scholars in their emphasis upon the study of the languages, and was himself a student of the classics. He was, however, primarily a theologian and hence devoted all of his energy to the study of Scripture establishing its teachings and holding to them despite everything. He and the Reformation were greatly benefited by Humanism but were not completely dependent upon it.

In this manner the Roman Church, which had fostered the Renaissance, influenced the Reformation to its own disadvantage. It had in this small way prepared the ground upon which the Lutheran Church was to arise, while Rome herself had discouraged,

opposed, and eradicated every other attempt at Reform. It was the Hand of God which shaped the various events all of which led up to the greatest movement of modern times, the Reformation, and who gave it its leader in the person of Doctor Martin Luther.

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